



AUTHENTICATING MATERIALS FOR LISTENING COMPREHENSION: REFLECTING PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The ultimate challenges for teachers of English nowadays are how they can make sustainable teaching and learning innovations for students to maintain motivation and interest in learning. There must be continuous searches for the creative development of meaningful English teaching and learning materials. In Palembang, among the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, finding the teaching materials for listening is not as easy as finding materials for the other three language skills. Therefore, teachers' innovative creativities are required to solve the problem by turning to the World Wide Web. The internet provides unlimited resources for teachers to develop listening materials which are up-to-the-minute and authentic. It is said that using authentic materials can reinforce for students the relationships between the language classroom and the outside world as it contextualizes the language learning. For example, when lessons are focused on comprehending a menu on TV, students tend to focus more on the content and meaning rather than the language itself. This offers students a valuable source of language input. So, they are not exposed only to the language usually presented by the teachers. In additions, authentic materials can keep students informed about what is happening in the world. Thus, they have intrinsic educational values which are in line with the 2013 Indonesian Education Curriculum. They also offer incidental or improper English and language changes which are not usually provided in unauthentic listening materials. A teacher can use the multimedia resources offered in the internet which will not only bring real life listening materials but also authentic ones. However, it does not mean that using authentic materials in teaching listening comprehension can easily improve students listening ability. The most important thing is to be able to choose the classroom activities which can meet the students' interests and needs

Keywords: Authentic, Listening, Adapting

INTRODUCTION

A teacher must always find ways to improve his or her teaching. Among others, updating books used in classes is an inevitable teachers' work which should never have a stop. However, it is always difficult to get books for Listening Comprehension at bookstores in Jakarta, let alone at bookstores in Palembang. Most English books available are for grammar, reading, and dictionaries. There are hardly books for Listening Comprehension. That is the reasons why teachers still use books written in 1980's. For example, at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University, teachers still use *Listening Contour* written by Michael Rost in 1987, and *Listening Focus* written by Ellen Kisslinger and Michael Rost in 1980. For sure, students will feel bored if they always listen to the outdated materials, whose content is also very far away from their real life. The types of the materials don't vary very much. In most cases, what students listen to is conversations and stories, but in reality they listen to far more things. The listening exercises, which are often prepared in advance and are often in the forms of true or false questions, multiple choice and short question answering, are usually recorded on the tape, and don't provide students with the kind of practice needed. Teaching students using those old books is an easy job for teachers, but it does not provide



learners with realistic preparation for real life listening. If students get used to this kind of slow and clear English, they will find it hard to communicate with English native speakers in real-life listening, because they may fail to follow the speed of speech and to understand the idioms and slangs used by native speakers. Moreover, since the books are used repeatedly, junior students do not usually find all the exercises in the books challenging anymore. They can get the answers for the exercises from their seniors who have used the books before. Therefore, a teacher must create his/her own listening comprehension teaching resources by utilizing the easy access to the world wide web. Audios and videos for developing listening comprehension are downloadable from the internet which also provide authenticity to the listening materials. This paper will discuss the importance of authentic listening materials and strategies for finding and developing the raw materials to fit the needs of teachers and students.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Authentic Listening Comprehension Material

Authentic materials are any teaching and learning materials which are taken from any resources and are not specifically produced for the purposes of teaching and learning in the classrooms. Rogers (1988) defines authentic materials as “appropriate” and “quality” in terms of goals, objectives, learner needs and interest and “natural” in terms of real life and meaningful communication. Nunan (1999) also defines authentic materials as spoken or written language data that has been produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written for purposes of language teaching. In addition, Harmer (1991) defines authentic texts are defined as materials which are designed for native speakers; they are real text; designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language. Similarly, Jordan (1997) refers to authentic texts as texts that are not written for language teaching purposes. Authentic listening materials are the audios and/or videos taken from any resources specifically not produced for use in the teaching and learning process. Based on these definitions, authentic materials are real language; produced for the native speakers; designed without the teaching purposes.

In relation to that, Gebhard (1996) provides the following examples of authentic materials for teachers to use:

- Authentic Listening Comprehension Materials: TV commercials, quiz shows, cartoons, news clips, comedy shows, movies, soap operas, professionally audio-taped short stories and novels, radio ads, songs, documentaries, and sales pitches.
- Authentic Visual Materials: slides, photographs, paintings, children’s artwork, stick-figure drawings, wordless street signs, silhouettes, pictures from magazines, ink blots, postcard pictures, wordless picture books, stamps.
- Authentic Printed Materials: newspaper articles, movie advertisements, astrology columns, sports reports, obituary columns, advice columns, lyrics to songs, restaurant menus, street signs, cereal boxes, candy wrappers, tourist information brochures, university catalogs, telephone books, maps, TV guides, comic books, greeting cards, grocery coupons, pins with messages, and bus schedules.
- Realia: coins and currency, folded paper, wall clocks, phones, Halloween masks, dolls, and puppets.



Rationale for using authentic listening materials

Samar Aal, a language fellow from RELO, in one of her workshops, explained the importance of authentic materials. She said that authentic materials provide a real-life language to the students, can be adapted easily, are more engaging, fun, fast, and free. Moreover, Gebhard (1996) sees authentic materials as a way to contextualize" language learning. When lessons are centered on comprehending a menu or a TV weather report, students tend to focus more on content and meaning rather than the language itself. This offers students a valuable source of language input, so that they are not being exposed only to the language presented by the text and the teacher. In addition, Melvin and Stout (1987) find an overall increased motivation to learn in students, as well as a renewed interest in the subject matter, when students use authentic materials for the study of culture in the language classroom. Also, there are some researchers who point out that more authentic materials are needed in the classroom because of the wide disparity that is often found between materials developed specifically for English language teaching and authentic conversation. Porter and Roberts (1981) show several differences between authentic materials and non-authentic materials in terms of spoken language. They illustrated that conversations recorded for language texts often have a slow pace, have particular structures which recur with obtrusive frequency, and have very distinct turn-taking of speakers. Also, hesitations (such as "uh's" and "mm's") are often missing, and sentences are very well-formed with few if any mistakes. In other words, what the language learners hear in class is different from the language in the real world. In many cases, the language heard in classrooms is a stilted use of spoken language, and authenticity is lost because of a need to teach specific language points in a way that some teachers feel would be more understandable for learners.

Authentic materials are also important in the following ways as Brosnan et al. (1984) say:

1. Authentic language offers students the chance to deal with a small amount of material which, at the same time, contains complete and meaningful messages.
2. Authentic materials provide students with the opportunity to make use of non-linguistic clues (the physical setting in which it occurs) to help them discover the meaning more easily.
3. Adults need to be able to see the immediate relevance of what they do in the classroom to what they need to do outside it, and real-life material treated realistically makes the connection obvious.

STRATEGIES IN DEVELOPING AUTHENTIC LISTENING MATERIALS

The first thing to do to develop the raw listening materials downloaded from the internet is to install one of the sound editors which is available on the world wide web with no charge. The one I usually use is WavePad Sound Editor which can be downloaded from www.nch.com.au. It is said that WavePad Sound Editor Free is part of a suite of audio- and video-editing apps that help polish media files. WavePad is music editing program for the Windows OS. WavePad allows us to create and edit voice, music and other sound recordings. We can duplicate sections of recordings and add echo, amplification, noise reduction and other effects. The following are characteristics of WavePad Sound Editor:

- * Recorder supports autotrim and voice activated recording;
- * Music editing functions include cut, copy, paste, delete, insert, silence, autotrim;
- * Music restoration features including noise reduction and click pop removal;
- * Special effects include reduce vocals, distortion, chorus;
- * Batch processing allows you to apply effects and/or convert your files as a single function;
- * Supports sample rates from 6000 to 96000Hz, stereo or mono, 8, 16, 24 or 32 bits;

- *Pre-defined sound quality suggestions when saving files such as CD Quality and Radio Quality;
- *Advanced tools include sound spectral analysis (FFT);
- *Load sound files directly from CD;
- * Ability to work with multiple files at the same time in separate screens.

After the program installed in the computer, just click the icon and it is ready to help us develop the unedited teaching materials. This screen will appear with clear buttons of editing procedures needed. To start editing a file, click the *open file* icon



This screen appears and choose the file to be edited.



Then press *enter*, the following screen appears and the file is ready to be edited.



The followings are editing keys commonly used:

Selected Region

Many of the edit functions below apply to the selected region. To mark the selected region you can either click and hold down on the wave window and drag the mouse or press and hold down the shift key while moving in the file. To select the entire file press Ctrl+A.

Undo

To Undo is to restore the file to its state before the previous edit function. This is useful if you want to try an edit or just make a mistake. To undo your last action press Ctrl+Z.



Note: You can undo up to 8 last actions.

Cut (Ctrl+X)

To 'cut' is to delete the selected region but to keep a copy on the clipboard so it can be 'pasted' somewhere else. This is useful when moving parts of the audio around in the file.

To cut select the region and then press Ctrl+X.

Copy (Ctrl+C)

To 'copy' is to make a copy of the selected region to the clipboard so you can paste it in another location. This is useful if you want to duplicate a part of the audio and insert (or mix it) in another file.

To copy select the region and then press Ctrl+C. To copy the entire file press Ctrl+A-C.

Paste (Ctrl+V)

Paste can only be used after you have used the Cut or Copy functions (above) to take a selected region to the clipboard.

The paste function replaces the current selected region (or inserts if there is no selection). To replace a selection press Ctrl+V. To insert click on the position and press Ctrl+V.

Delete (Del)

To delete the selected region press the Delete key. This is similar to the cut function but a copy is not taken to the clipboard.

Amplify

To 'amplify' is to increase the loudness or volume of the selected region. To make a part of the recording softer or louder, select it and then use the menu Effects -> Amplify. The volume is entered in percent (100 being no change, 50 being -6dB softer or 200 being +6dB louder).

Normalize

To 'normalize' is to adjust the volume so that the loudest peak is equal to (or a percentage of) the maximum signal that can be used in digital audio. Usually you normalize files to 100% as the last stage in production to make it the loudest possible without distortion.

Next, download audios for listening comprehension from the internet. There are plenty of websites which offer downloadable talks, interviews, news, discussions, etc. For example, <http://voanews.com>, <http://bbc.co.uk>, <http://ted.com>, <http://americanenglish.gov>, etc. provide various topics which can be interesting for students. The Beginner Level students can be given audio materials such as songs, announcement, and advertisements. The upper level students fit to listen to audio materials such as interviews, radio news, radio stories, and radio reports. The advanced level students can listen to the audio materials such as lectures and debates. Use the keys above to cut unnecessary parts of the audios which then can be amplified and saved.

These activities can be chosen as classroom exercises following the listening sessions. Pick out activities which are appropriate for the level of students being taught

1. Listening for the gist and giving titles
2. True or false, multiple choices, comprehension check.
3. Close activity.
4. Pre, during, and post questions
5. Dictation.
6. Predictions
7. Verbal summary
8. Free note-taking
9. Retelling using notes.



CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the fact that finding listening comprehension books is difficult in Indonesia, it should not be a reason for not updating materials used for our students. A teacher can use the multimedia resources offered in the internet which will not only bring real life listening materials but also authentic ones. . Authentic materials have many advantages compared with inauthentic materials. However, it does not mean that using authentic materials in teaching listening comprehension can easily improve students listening ability. The most important thing is to be able to choose the classroom activities which can meet the students' interests and needs.

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